

full time, they are earning poverty wages.

We have 22 percent of our children living in poverty. That is the highest rate of childhood poverty in the industrialized world by far. That is double the rate of any other country. And we have at a time that some of our friends are proposing to cut back on WIC and to cut back on food stamps, we have 5 million children in America who are hungry today.

Let's talk about that issue. Tax breaks for the rich increased hunger for children at a time when we have the highest rate of childhood poverty in the industrialized world.

Let me talk about another issue. Our Republican friends talk about the mandate they received on November 8. Let me say a word about that mandate.

What percentage of the people came out to vote in that mandate? Thirty-nine percent of the people came out to vote. Republicans ended up with a smaller percentage, a little bit larger percentage than the Democrats did. Thirty-nine percent of the people came out to vote.

I am happy to say that in my home city of Burlington, VT on election day just this last Tuesday a progressive was elected mayor. We had 50 percent of the people coming out in a local election.

Why is it that so few people participate in the Democratic process in America? Why is it that poor people in America virtually don't vote at all, many working people don't vote at all? And I think the reason is that the people are basically giving up on the political system.

WELFARE REFORM

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Under a previous order of the House, the gentleman from Nevada [Mr. ENSIGN] is recognized for 5 minutes.

Mr. ENSIGN. Mr. Speaker, since Lyndon Johnson first launched the Great Society programs of the 1960s this country has now spent over \$5 trillion to defeat poverty, a war that we have since lost and lost miserably.

You know, some people around here try to define compassion as how much money we can give to people and how many people we can put on welfare and how many people we can make dependent on a system that has failed that has destroyed the family. That has had crime rate skyrocket over the last 30 years, that has seen out-of-wedlock birth and we need to abandon that system and start over.

Incremental welfare reform will not work. President Clinton said it is time to honor and reward people who work hard and play by the rules. The administration knows that our welfare system is broken.

The people who defend our current welfare system want to keep people, or at least they seem to at least want to keep people in poverty. That can be the

only justification for defending the current welfare system.

We are here and we were sent here to revolutionize the welfare system. It does not work. Government cannot be compassionate by definition because the word compassion means "to suffer with." Only individuals can suffer with other individuals, to offer them a hand up instead of a handout.

Our welfare system was intended to be a safety net in between work. If you happened to get in trouble, there was a safety net. What was intended to be a safety net has now become a hammock that, in time, becomes like a spider web that just entraps people and they cannot get out of it.

When I was campaigning, I would go through and meet different people, and I have a brochure and one of the things in the brochure talked about mandatory work for welfare recipients. Single mothers that I met with, that was the thing that they picked up on almost immediately every time that I met them. Mandatory work for people that are out there struggling, and they know that their tax dollars are going to pay for somebody that could be working, but is not. That is the hallmark of our welfare plan that will be voted on later this month.

You know, our country is a great country. And we have been known to be an opportunity society that has attracted people from around the world. But to continue to keep people in poverty is wrong. It is morally wrong.

This is not a question of economics; this is a question of morality. It is morally wrong to keep people in poverty by making them dependent on a system that they just don't see any way that they can get out of.

I believe that our country needs to become that opportunity society once again. We need to encourage small businesses and jobs, encourage entrepreneurs that are going to get out there and create opportunities for minorities and women and all people. We need to look for economic principles that don't benefit the rich, that don't benefit the middle class or the poor, they benefit all classes of people, young and old, black and white, Hispanic. It does not matter.

We need to have principles that look for situations where all classes of people win. Instead of saying it is the Republicans or the Democrats, we need to put partisanship aside. I have only been here a short time and the partisanship of this place is sickening on committees and on the House floor. We need to put that aside and work for the American people. We were all sent here to solve the problems that a lot of this government has created. We were sent here to solve those problems, and we need to get down to doing the business that the American people sent us here to do.

In conclusion, let me say that I am proud to represent the people of Nevada. They are hard-working people with the work ethic, I think, that is known throughout the West. And be-

cause of that work ethic, they sent me here to get people off of welfare and into work.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Under a previous order of the House, the gentleman from Louisiana [Mr. FIELDS] is recognized for 5 minutes.

[Mr. FIELDS of Louisiana addressed the House. His remarks will appear hereafter in the Extensions of Remarks.]

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Under a previous order of the House, the gentleman from Kentucky [Mr. WHITFIELD] is recognized for 5 minutes.

[Mr. WHITFIELD addressed the House. His remarks will appear hereafter in the Extensions of Remarks.]

CHILD SUPPORT ENFORCEMENT AND COLLECTION SYSTEM

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Under a previous order of the House, the gentleman from Maryland [Mr. HOYER] is recognized for 5 minutes.

Mr. HOYER. Mr. Speaker, one of the most critical areas in need of reform is our child support enforcement and collection system. Too many absent parents are not meeting their responsibility of emotionally and financially supporting their children.

Bringing children into this world and not supporting them is an irresponsible act and it is wrong. The time has come for us to put an end to this irresponsible behavior.

Those of us who work hard and play by the rules can no longer continue supporting a system in which responsibility is abandoned. Enough is enough.

Americans expect and we need to demand that both parents support their children. We must discourage government dependence and expect every able-bodied American to be personally responsible for their actions. The previous speaker talked about that. This is not a partisan issue. This is a critical issue if America is going to succeed to build a better society for our children and generations to come.

Payment of child support should be as certain as taxes and death. Each year failure to collect child support costs our country billions of dollars and children billions of dollars.

The potential for our child support collection is estimated at around \$48 billion. However, only \$14 billion is actually collected. This leaves an estimated collection gap of \$34 billion per year that parents are not paying to support their children and expecting the rest of us to pick up the slack.

Clearly, we need to take care of those children. But we also need to demand that parents are there first.

Moreover, half of the women eligible for child support are receiving nothing. These statistics send a clear signal that we have got a lot more work to do.